United Nations S/2000/793

Security Council

Distr.: General
11 August 2000

Original: English

Letter dated 11 August 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued on 11 August 2000 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Fesseha A. **Tessema**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

00-60475 (E) 110800

Annex to the letter dated 11 August 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Statement by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Playing a Dangerous Game

11 August 2000

The Eritrean regime is playing a dangerous game. Following the agreement on cessation of hostilities signed in Algiers on 18 June 2000 (S/2000/627, enclosure), the regime has escalated its repressive actions against innocent Ethiopian civilians that reside in Eritrea. The regime should realize that it cannot get away from assuming full responsibility for its actions and that Ethiopia and the international community cannot be expected to tolerate the cruel and irresponsible actions launched against the defenceless by the Asmara authorities.

It is known that, between 20 June and 4 August 2000, about 10,000 Ethiopians returned to their country through nine operations in which the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been involved.

The Eritrean regime, however, has continued to expel Ethiopians through unacceptable means and routes which are unsafe, causing casualties in the process. In the past few days alone, the Eritrean authorities have expelled 6,428 persons under dangerous and inhuman conditions. The details are as follows:

567 persons via the Mereb River on 30 July;

3,300 persons via the Tsorona front line on 2 August;

261 persons via the Mereb River on 4 August;

2,300 persons via the Mereb River on 7 August.

The ICRC has recognized the fact that the Eritrean regime is committing crimes in its expulsion policy. In a press statement, the ICRC said that the expulsions were carried out "without the necessary conditions of security" and "without the knowledge and involvement of the ICRC." Persons, mainly children, women and the elderly, were forced to walk for 40 kilometres for 18 hours, over dangerous and mined areas before reaching Ethiopian positions and safety. The ICRC has reported that five persons have died and that it will seek to learn the exact details.

The Eritrean regime continues to charge falsely that Ethiopia refuses to accept its citizens. The opposite is true. Ethiopia anxiously awaits the return of its citizens not via Mereb or Tsorona but through safe routes, such as the Senafe and Asseb routes and in the presence of the ICRC.

There is another persistent and disturbing phenomenon — that Eritrea is only allowing some women, children and the elderly to go home, while continuing to incarcerate the men in concentration camps. This abominable situation cannot be allowed to continue.

The fact that Eritrea is maintaining concentration camps at which tens of thousands of Ethiopians are kept under inhuman conditions, many of whom are being used by the Eritrean authorities for slave labour, cannot remain hidden for too long. This is apart from those who have been incarcerated in various Eritrean prisons. Moreover, hundreds of Ethiopians in Eritrea have been made to disappear and their whereabouts are still unknown. Eritrea will have to be made to answer for all this by the international community.

Ethiopia has been appealing to the international community to prevail upon the callous regime in Eritrea to let Ethiopians return to their homeland in conditions of safety. On this occasion, Ethiopia reiterates its calls on the international community to take a firm stand publicly against these inhuman deeds by the Eritrean authorities. The international community — specifically, those with the mandate in this area — have the responsibility to prevail upon the Eritrean authorities to stop forthwith their cruel and inhuman treatment of innocent Ethiopians residing in Eritrea. Ethiopia also calls on the international community to provide assistance to those who have already returned under difficult and excruciating circumstances, having been the target of mass deportation by the Eritrean authorities.

Ethiopia wishes to make it clear that the Eritrean regime should consider itself warned that continuing to pursue its cruel policies of incarceration and mass expulsion through minefields of Ethiopian citizens will have grave consequences for which the Eritrean authorities will be held responsible.